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ABSTRACT

This report studies the phenomenon of intercultural communication workshops as they are appearing in the United States. Emphasis is placed on background information, trends in the conduct and operations of intercultural workshops, assessment of the intercultural communication workshop phenomenon, characteristics of the workshop experience, fundamental needs within the field, and recommendations. Recommendations suggest that: (1) a group of professionals be called together or review and make specific recommendations as to the focus, philosophy, and conduct of intercultural communication workshops; (2) the specific projects of a research nature be contracted to assess the influence of the intercultural communications workshop on participating individuals; (3) a list of individuals experienced and deemed qualified to conduct and to advise others as to the effective operation of intercultural communication workshops be established and generally available; (4) geographical regions within the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs identify persons and agencies competent and interested in intercultural small group experiences and that regional task forces be encouraged to focus on any of the recommendations herein. (Author/MJM)

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REPORT OF THE NAFSA TASK FORCE ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOPS

The Task Force on Intercultural Communication Workshops of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs met in Washington, D.C., from August 28, 1972 through September 2, 1972. Operating under a grant from the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the Task Force, composed of various professionals well-versed and experienced in intercultural communication workshops,[1] reviewed research and materials and held discussions with various individuals who presented particular expertise within the field.[2] The purpose of the Task Force was to study the phenomenon of intercultural communication workshops[3] as they are appearing in the United States and to present recommendations from the Task Force to the Association.

Intercultural communication workshops began in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1966 under the auspices of the Regional Council for International Education. At that time, the Regional Council for International

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[2]Edward Stewart of ACTION; Arthur F. Byrnes of the Agency for International Development; Cyril Mill of the National Training Laboratories; Elaine Comegys of the School for International Training; Neil Boyer and Claudia Anyaso of the United States Department of State; and David Hoopes of the Regional Council for International Education.

[3]For the purposes of this report, "intercultural communication workshop" is used to refer to any intercultural small group experience, typically involving American and international students as participants plus certain individuals who serve as group "leaders".

Education attempted to apply recently developed themes and techniques of intercultural communication and group psychology to a multicultural group of American and international students. These early groups were initially used as orientation experiences to provide a bridge for the international student to the American institution of higher education and to American culture. Within the workshops themselves, a major focus was to encourage each participant -- be he or she from the United States or another country -- candidly to exchange information, feelings, and perceptions on values and experiences of personal importance. Essentially, participants were encouraged to relate to each other both cognitively and experientially. Other institutions began to schedule similar intercultural communication workshops -- each adding something unique to its own setting or personnel. Then in 1970, the Regional Council for International Education began publishing Communique, a newsletter focusing on developments pertaining to intercultural communication workshops.

More recently, there has been a sizeable increase in the number of institutions initiating some form of intercultural communication experience. Many have developed resource materials and specialized faculty for this particular field. Several agencies and professional associations have also expressed a strong, and in some cases, a formalized interest in the field of intercultural communication workshops. Included, besides NAFSA, are the American Psychological Association, the Speech Communication Association, and the International Communication Association. The result of all of this activity has been an increased number of intercultural communication workshops conducted at various campuses and by various agencies during the past few years.

From such a recent origin, then, intercultural communication workshops have become a factor offering a positive contribution to the life of international and American students on a wide number of college and university campuses. According to the Task Force's findings, at least seventy-three (73) professionals (half of whom are "foreign student advisers") can be identified as having been directly engaged in leading such workshops involving a reported number of ca. 11,696 international students and ca. 7,524 American students. Clearly such a phenomenon raises basic and profound questions as to standards of conduct, types of group experiences, ethics, etc.

The Task Force itself attempted to look thoroughly into the conduct and operations of intercultural communication workshops. The following data and partial conclusions are derived from a survey completed by the Task Force between May 31, 1972 and June 26, 1972. Response to this survey netted a 22.5% return rate (N=73), leaving

the data inconclusive; however, it was clearly evident that those individuals reporting involvement with intercultural communication workshops attached a high degree of positive value to their experiences.[4] Specifically, the trends evident in the data indicated:

1. That the respondents who had participated in such workshops saw the primary goal of the workshop to be "to encourage an understanding of cultural factors as they influence interpersonal communication" and "to share common human experiences in an accepting environment."

2. That the majority of the reported workshops were financially sponsored by the participants themselves, government agencies, and offices of international student affairs.

3. That more than half of the responding leaders reported "academic training" in the area of "group leadership" and almost all also reported having had training with the National Training Laboratory, National Training Laboratory West, Esalen, or the Center for the Study of the Person.

4. That the greatest number of leaders reported their predominant style within the group as being that of an "explorer" - "primary input with questions about cultural differences, mediates clarification and understanding - gives high support - moderate personal disclosure" (sic). The leaders reported spending most of their time within the group sessions "listening silently" and at times encouraging expression of and responses to feelings, initiating subjects for discussion by giving opinions, exploring manifestations of cultural differences, and exploring the nature of the communication taking place within the group.

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[4]It should also be admitted that there were 327 respondents to this survey who indicated that they had never participated in a formal group with international students. Most of these individuals were positive to the notion of "intercultural communication workshops", but a few were very strongly opposed, equating, in many cases, the "intercultural communication workshop" with what they thought of as a "sensitivity group." The Task Force, however, did not analyze responses of individuals having no prior intercultural group experience.

5. That more respondents reported "self-selection" of student participants than pre-selection of students prior to their participation.

6. That most reported workshops lasted three days.

7. That one-to-one dialogues and/or small group exercises were felt most effective in attaining the workshop's goals.

8. That non-verbal physical or written exercises were commonly utilized during the workshops themselves.

9. That although (a) "informal discussions among participants and leaders after the conclusion" of the workshop, (b) a "written evaluation form filled out by each participant before the conclusion" of the workshop, and (c) "follow-up written evaluation by individuals after the conclusion" of the workshop were reportedly used to assess the effectiveness of the workshop experience, a high number of leaders reported that "no evaluation" was made of the intercultural communication workshop group.

10. That the workshops were reported to be most commonly but not exclusively used during an "initial orientation program", but also during "topical weekend outings (e.g. on friendship)", an "orientation program after some weeks of classes", a "program during school vacation (e.g. Christmas)", a "dormitory program for residents of one building", "training of staff members who work with U.S. and foreign students", "host family training programs", a "pre-departure program for foreign students returning home", and a "faculty orientation program".

11. That beyond any possible doubt, the reported evaluations of the respondents who had participated in the workshop experiences were extremely favorable.

Drawing upon the extensive experiences, discussions, and consultations held by this Task Force, the Task Force is prepared to give its tentative assessment of the intercultural communication workshop phenomenon. The Task Force finds that the intercultural communication workshop experience, when designed and conducted responsibly, is conducive (1) to effective intercultural communication, (2) to realization of the participant's goals, and (3) to the effective functioning of persons working with foreign students.

The following are some characteristics of the intercultural communication workshop experience which recommend it to those interested in participating creatively in international education:

A. Many intercultural communication workshop experiences are held at retreats and other locations removed from the academic institution and everyday activities. This provides the group leader with an unusual opportunity to work with international and American students away from the distractions and pressures of their and the leader's regular environments. Such a setting, together with peer support and the relaxation offered at the intercultural communication workshop, often encourages international students to be candid about their experiences, problems, and concerns. International student personnel are thereby given an unusual opportunity to understand the student and his values in a way that can increase the institution's effectiveness in understanding and working with the individual international student.

B. One of the primary responsibilities of international student personnel, governmental officials concerned with cultural and educational affairs, and other interested educators is that the international student be offered a balanced education, one that respects and enhances both his cognitive and affective dimensions. The intercultural communications workshop experience encourages such multidimensional personal interaction and integration.

C. A central responsibility of the international student personnel staff is to ensure that the international student is encouraged to develop a personal understanding of the contemporary United States. Clearly, group experiences of the type provided by the intercultural communications workshop are an increasingly important segment of the recent educational philosophies centering upon what is termed "experiential education". The intercultural communication workshop is a valid experience in experiential education itself, but it offers a facet that cannot be easily duplicated at any other point within the formal educational system -- the multicultural interaction and exchanges of values and the potential for all that can develop from such, including a more objective understanding by the international student of the United States and of the diversity of opinions and values held by her citizens from various sub-cultures. The intercultural communication workshop furthermore has the potential to enable the international student not only to understand the United States more accurately, but also to contribute more substantially upon return to his or her native land to the communication and understanding process among peoples. The workshop is both process and content.

D. The intercultural communications workshop, competently conducted, is an unusual opportunity for international students and international student personnel and also for American students and educators to explore and readjust images of themselves and their personal cultures, as well as images of the other participants and their cultures.

E. Finally, the multidisciplinary characteristics of intercultural communications workshops are of direct benefit to the professional development of the participating international student personnel staff members. Not only is the staff person's understanding of individuals and groups greatly increased, but the staff person has the opportunity of using the intercultural communication group experience as a vehicle to involve faculty from various academic fields into interdisciplinary exchanges of a wide variety.

It should be clearly recognized, however, that this Task Force strongly feels the need for more effective and defined research studies focusing on the intercultural communications workshop experience.

Presently, this Task Force sees four fundamental needs within the field:

1. the establishment of criteria for assessment and evaluation of intercultural communication workshop experiences.

2. the establishment of principles and guidelines for institutions desiring to conduct intercultural communication workshop experiences.

3. the preparation of a scholarly article presenting a "state of the art" report on the field of intercultural communication workshop experiences to the wider interested professional and academic community.

4. the sponsorship and encouragement of specific and controlled research studies into the assessment and evaluation of intercultural communication workshop experiences.

There is a demand for substantive and complete information on intercultural small group experiences. The growth of these experiences within the last several years seems startling and should not be ignored. In light of such rapid growth and development and in line with the Task Force's professional responsibility to inform its colleagues, it is the Task Force's best collective and weighted judgment that the following recommendations be instituted through NAFSA:

1. that a group of professionals be called together to review and make specific recommendations as to the focus, philosophy, and conduct of intercultural communication workshops. The Task Force feels that, while not interfering with a group leader's professional responsibility to facilitate his individual group, a mutually agreed upon philosophy as to the focus and conduct of in-

tercultural communication workshops would increase a wider understanding of the general movement and sharpen the beneficial results likely to occur.

2. that specific projects of a research nature be contracted to assess the influences of the intercultural communications workshop upon participating individuals.

3. that a list of individuals experienced and deemed qualified to conduct and to advise others as to the effective operation of intercultural communication workshops be established and made generally available.

4. that geographical regions within NAFSA identify persons and agencies competent and interested in intercultural small group experiences and that regional task forces be encouraged to focus upon any of the recommendations herein.

5. that NAFSA itself establish a standing task force charged with coordinating nationally the developments pertaining to intercultural communication workshops.

6. that NAFSA support and implement a program to train a group of workshop trainers in the skills needed to train other workshop trainers at the regional level.